



ANARCHISTNEWS.ORG SERIES 3



In Defense of Smashing Cameras

article from Rabble.org
from anarchistnews.org

We are making ourselves vulnerable to attack.

More seriously, we are making each other vulnerable. Photographers at demonstrations will soon outnumber demonstrators, those who are willing to take action. This is something we need to take a stand against. Cameras are tools of surveillance, and whether it is us or the enemy that wields them, we are participating in our own surveillance. Groups and individuals who have an interest in publicity and photo opportunities need to recognise the fact that they can make everyone else vulnerable to repression and less effective. One group's photo op is unwanted Twitter publicity for the 100 people surrounding them.

It is not a question of the desires of the few dictating the safety of the majority; it is a question of the politics of these desires. A protest is an attack, or at least, the threat of one. Considering this is a show of our strength, we need to seriously consider: what makes us less strong, less effective, what makes the collective-in-movement less powerful and more at risk? And here it is the cameras, which are continuous with techniques of surveillance.

Stopping for photos when you are part of a big group puts everyone at risk, risks separating those you are walking with from the safety of large numbers, and risks everyone behind you also being subjected to the penetrating eye of the journalist's lens. This not only subjects others to your desire for publicity or fifteen minutes of fame for your actions (an ideological position it should not be assumed that every member of a collective action or formation desires), but can also lead to people who are ready to do something interesting feeling hesitant, after spending an hour with their every footstep, flag wave, and expression documented and disseminated by the multitudinous horde of camera clicking parasites.

Publicity is one issue. If we are on the streets we are in public; we are surveilled. We can't escape this. What we can control is intelligible visibility. The reason we mask up is to

become opaque, to elude intelligibility. Being photographed against our will is a direct attack against our attempts of obfuscation and ought to be treated as such. Cameras are tools of the surveillance state and dominant forms of control that our very presence on the streets seeks to dismantle.

Photographs at actions of our actions weaken us and consequently weaken our ability to act. This is not paranoia; it is a fact. For every police photograph, there are ten more incriminating ones on twitter. For every official observation, every surveillance camera pointed our direction, we are doing ourselves the injustice of allowing ourselves to be recorded, disseminated and documented by our peers, in the name of free speech or journalistic impartiality, entitlement, whatever you want to call it. And it has to stop.

This isn't an innocent game where you spot yourself on Facebook and marvel at how rebellious you look. The reality is people face jail time because of foolish Twitter posts. The other reality is that sometimes it's not just foolishness. There are journalists at demos who aren't just capturing their bit of riot porn to excite /Vice/ readers. Some photographers explicitly try to capture faces, try to catch you in the act. These people are scum and should not be protected simply because we believe that journalists have some kind of impartiality, some right that is above our desires to protect ourselves.

Our concern is not concerning the so-called right to take pictures in a public place. We could care less about this boring defence that photographers resort to when critiqued. Our question is not: what are your rights in public? Rather: where do you stand when it comes to social struggle? How do you act to further revolt? Simply put, journalists do not have any political right to a "spectacle". They have the ability to participate in a moment of revolt and they forgo that capacity by consigning the event to a digital memory rather than a future possibility. While photographic evidence has been useful in the past, we maintain that by prioritizing documentation, in

ignorance or indifference to its effect on an action, journalists are not comrades in the present.

Spectators do not act. Time and again, photographers actually inhibit the unfurling of events by standing right in front of an action, rushing forward, blocking your way to support your friends and documenting your attempts to do so. Eyes without bodies do not move, but they may propel enemies. When you take a photograph at a demo before anything actually happens, if something does happen, the police can use that photograph to construct a narrative and build identities. You could spotlight someone involved in something that hasn't even happened yet, highlight that crucial piece of evidence the police will use to solidify their case against us. To inhibit possibility and limit potential is not something we should simply accept.

It's time to fight back. This is a call out for people to stand up against those who are putting our lives in danger. People who take photographs and post them online, without blurring faces or cropping out identities, put us at risk and we should not be complacent. In other countries with much stronger movements, complacency is not so dominant; people often smash cameras they see pointed at their friends and deliberately documenting them. They destroy cameras because they recognise that these instruments can and do lead to arrests and arrests can ruin lives and destroy a movement. Why tolerate an instrument that supports and reinforces our oppression? Our surveillance? We should learn from our friends across Europe, who are so much more adept at rebellion than we are, so much less complacent.

That said, we are not luddites. To the contrary, we love a good photo and we cannot dismiss the seductive qualities of images in the age of spectacles. There's a reason we call it riot porn. We've even printed and framed the memories we love best. We recognise the importance of documenting certain struggles, to spread the message, to share with our friends

abroad, to help ignite the fire of rebellion. Photos move enemies, but they also move us. This is not a critique of cameras /as such/, but of a particular and dominant usage: *“Arms as inert objects do not exist. What do exist are arms in action, i.e. that are used (or waiting to be used) in a given perspective.... Behind the thing there is always the individual, the individual who acts, plans, uses means to attain ends”* (Alfredo Bonanno, “The Refusal of Arms”).

We have friends who we trust to take good photos, but the key word here is trust. We consider them part of our struggles and think of them as partisans and accomplices in social war. Assuming then that you want to participate in social struggle as a friend and have committed yourself to the camera, here are some proposed guidelines:

1. Contrary to what many protest-photography tips tell you, don't get up close.
2. If there are faces in your shot, blur them. A simple swirl in Photoshop won't do. We're talking scrambling such the police cannot reverse the process.
3. If there is distinctive or identifying clothing in your shot, blur them.
4. If certain identities stick out (the few black bodies in a white protest, the few visibly disabled in a seemingly able-bodied demonstration, etc. etc.), delete the photo.
5. If you choose to participate as a spectator, then realise your participation is secondary to those actively engaged in the moment of revolt. This means you should step aside, even if it means losing that 'wining' shot.

6. If possible—and it usually is—ask for consent or indicate that you are taking a photo so that we have an option to turn away or decline. Yes, we get it. We are in a public place and you don't have to ask, but realise that failure to ask makes us suspicious of your motivations and provides us with added reason to assert our capacity for opacity.
7. Your camera is a weapon. Friendly fire is not acceptable.
8. You are a partisan in social war. Become involved in the struggles you choose to document. Should they be documented? If so, how should they be documented to spread their capacities? Become a comrade and earn the trust of those around you. Excepting professional activists, for the vast majority of us, this is not a career.
9. Photograph the police.
10. Infer more guidelines from the analysis above.

Until a conversation about protest photography becomes more pervasive, until guidelines like these become more common, until the burden is on photographers and not on active participants, until then...

This is a call for people to smash cameras. Time and time again we see our friends being taken away because someone chose their five moments of fame, the titillation of seeing his photo of our fucking faces making it onto the pages of Vice, the Evening Standard, the Guardian. They choose that above standing next to their friends and accomplices and fighting against the surveillance state that controls us all. Maybe the hack is on our side; maybe they think they are spreading the word, spreading the revolt. It doesn't matter. For right now, all they are doing is contributing to a climate of inaction, of fear

of action, spreading information that those who seek to bring us down will use against us. Next time you see someone thrusting their lens in someone's face, getting a little too close and personal, blocking your path to assist your friends so they can get a winning angle, we ask you not to stand idly by.

Fight back. Protect your friends. #smashcameras

Tags:

surveillance

acab

cameras

photographers

spectacle

13300 reads

The self-proclaimed (??) National Union of Journalists (NUJ) did not like this article, and sent us the following response:

The NUJ Photographer's Council has responded to an online comment piece urging people to smash media cameras:

"The NUJ is appalled at the recent article on a self-proclaimed anarchist website which advocates the smashing of cameras used to film or photograph protests and demonstrations, if such image making does not meet with the approval of protesters, or if the image makers are not 'partisans and accomplices in social war'.

"The suggestion to smash cameras of those who are there as media is an incitement to violence and is condemned by the NUJ.

"Our job is to record events. The NUJ condemns all violence against the media, for whatever reason and from whatever source."

Response from Rabble:

If we defend ourselves from those who both parasite off our resistance and could send us to jail for it, we are labelled violent. “Violence” is both a selling point for the spectacle-loving media, and then the trump card they use to delegitimise resistance.

In this society, journalists think they have the right to take and publish any pictures they want, without asking for consent, and regardless of any consequences. Few journalists give a flying fuck if their photos or videos become incriminating evidence used to screw up people’s lives as they are separated from their loved ones and psychologically tortured in hellholes called prisons.

But no, like the police, photographers certainly aren’t violent, they’re just ‘doing their job’. Violence is what trouble-makers do (poor people, black people, people who have no respect for authority, etc.) Prison, of course, is not violence: it is deserved punishment carried out by legitimate authorities, and necessary to the functioning of society. If you’ve done nothing wrong, you’ve got nothing to hide, right?

So, the journalists’ representatives are incensed about damage to cameras. But they don’t deign to notice the damage done by prison, or consider how photographers may contribute to this as police evidence gatherers.

As we understood the article, it was not calling for attacks on people taking photographs responsibly and respectfully, but referring to the need to protect ourselves against arrogant, dangerous fuckwits who don’t care about anything but their own egos and careers.

<https://rabble.org.uk/complaint-from-the-national-union-of-journalists/>

Comments

r

Wed, 04/13/2016 - 09:05

I think just contrary, this opinion is typical western paranoia to push ordinary people far away, scared, from anarchists.

many time when I participated in protests I saw ordinary people stopping and using smartphones to record protest. instead to attack passerby who use camera when protest march pass beside him, it is better to cover your face and leave camera men in peace. it is YOUR responsibility to cover your face when you break the law, it is not responsibility of others to care about your face. attacking people, who didn't know there will be protest but they record it, including your face, is bad for spreading protest, for getting people to become anarchists. typical western paranoia, "million activists were arrested because of camera records of different people published in guardian". let's publish list of people arrested in that way, there is nobody arrested accidentally, cops have their camera people and secret service can use photos of any official journalist from capitalist media who was present at the protest. you can't forbid to all journalists to come to the protest and surely not to attack all of them when they make photos. especially because many protest are not organized by anarchists and organizers like that media make report about protest, it means anarchists attach themselves to the protest which is not protest of anarchists + to attack camera people, that's catastrophic. today people use smartphone to record protests, they don't need professional cameras. there are many passerby and even people participating in protest who like to record and publish at facebook, etc, photos and video from protest. attacking them is keeping anarchists small isolated groups without influence on society, that's what secret service needs. anarchists don't need to be hated and isolated by the people. again, instead to make big philosophy about this, solution is very simple: you know when you participate peacefully in some protest and you know when you will break the law, behave about your face in accordance with that and don't demand from other people to care

about your face. simply so.

but instead to do so simple thing, you demand attacks on anyone who uses camera.

protest is not your “franchise”, you are not the owner of protests in order to attack people who use cameras. they are not enemies, cops and gov are enemies. as i said, anarchists participate million times in protest that is not organized by anarchists, attacking people with cameras would be catastrophic.

I think western security culture is created by anarchists working for the secret service, everything is done to keep anarchists small isolated groups. now we should go around and attack people instead to simply cover our face.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 14:13

Rebel's right that you won't have much luck trying to convince the whole world not to photograph you while engaging in revolt. Better to mask up, etc. and/or pick your moments carefully, do smart risk assessment (not just be paranoid). I mean, I've had these exact conversations with sympathetic radical media people but they're always outnumbered by the moderate liberals and the bourgeois corporate press. Being in the streets involves doing risk assessment and taking precautions, simple. That said, if there's one photographer who's being a shithead, fuck their shit up if you like and accept the consequences, do what you gotta do.

Anonymous

Wed, 04/13/2016 - 22:36

I reluctantly agree, although at least within my local context, I can identify four distinct groups of camera users that should be treated on their own merits. Three are fundamentally hostile. Corporate news media deserves whatever they get, and are clearly hostile. Here, they come to potentially confrontational protests with armed body guards wearing ear pieces. We also have right wing bloggers here who come to purposefully discredit actions, again clearly an enemy that have it coming to them. The third hostile category is the movement citizen journalists that appeared en masse during Occupy and who routinely

put amateur journalistic ethics above the movement, refusing to take even the most basic precautions to protect the supposed comrades that they are filming. The final category is the one you describe here, the bystander with their phone, which is ubiquitous these days. To attack every curious passerby that pulls out their phone is indeed a path to isolation.

?...,><>____.,)

Wed, 04/13/2016 - 23:26

Why do you care about being isolated? That is akin to adhering to nonviolence in general so as not to alienate the left. If someone forcefully enters you into an alienating relationship (cameras are a mediating phenomenon which destroy relational experience), then by all means, punch them and smash their shit.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 00:26

It's a strategic decision. As much as I'd like to go around punching everyone with a cell phone, it's probably not the best way to inspire widespread revolt. Isolation is the surest path to defeat, as has been demonstrated time and time again.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 06:45

But I don't think its calling for that. I think what its trying to say is that widespread revolt would be more successful if people weren't so worried about being surveilled. The point is not to go around smashing cameras AS YOUR ACTION but to make sure you can be safe and effective whilst engaging IN your action. Its saying that maybe more people would feel up for doing actions etc if they felt safer. And surely you must all have experienced the frustration of having to push through a gaggle of lenses to help out a friend or join in something fun.

Also, it does include guidelines for how to be a good camera user and does recognise that it has benefits... idk maybe it could have been more measured, and as said above, differentiated between different types of users, but its worth engaging with. Things are not as simple as allies vs. police. Journalists operate a sticky middle ground and often their good intentions can be

coopted for malicious purpose. its worth recognising that.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 11:54

“ If someone forcefully enters you into an alienating relationship ...then by all means, punch them and smash their shit.”

This basically justifies violence against anyone all the time. Literally, for even speaking a word.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 21:25

There are many ways of relating that don't involve alienating people. Try again.

Anonymous

Wed, 04/13/2016 - 17:29

During the Vancouver Stanley Cup riots in 2010 there were literally thousands of photos taken by bystanders and later submitted to a website that helped cops identify and arrest several protesters. Snitching has become so much easier with the widespread adoption of camera phones.

If you're doing black bloc or any kind of 'night work', cover yourself!

w

Wed, 04/13/2016 - 18:53

Clandestinity is fun too!

I know, its hard to be away from the glamour of the paparazzi.

Cameras rolling, police busting.

But clandestinity can be nice too, even when shared with our closest, most trusted allies.

Desire armed. Enormous problems with mass actions not to mention undercover cops.

There was once a drone named molotov, but it wasn't russian.

Who am I again?

I can't remember - no pictures!

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 04:00

The problem is that there is indeed power in numbers. For some ends, small groups will never be a significant enough means, no

matter how close the affinity. Anywhere larger groups form, the 'Complete Scrapbook of Humanity' crew will be there to spectacularize the moment. Preserving the history while altering the future. Bloc'ing up helps some with this, but has its own pitfalls.

r

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 11:50

photo in this article shows very well how people should behave, cover your face and destroy the bank, not people with cameras. you can expect from your comrades to care about you, but you can't go around and be unpleasant with people just because they use camera, they don't know anything about protest security culture.

simply, when people rob a bank, they don't blame camera for recording their face, they cover their face. it is the same for protest, camera will be always there, cover your face, don't blame people with camera.

in any case, much bigger problem are cops who are infiltrated among protesters and they can try to catch masked people who break something, it is much more important to organize help to save them than to care about cameras. even if your face is masked, cops can be around and try to arrest you, solidarity is much more needed about it than about cameras. people should have friends who will jump to set them free from cops, it means they must have pepper spray or something to use against cops in civilian cloths. but effective fight against cops depend how much protest is massive, if the protest is small, cops will arrest the whole group of anarchists very easy. people must decide when they will smash something and if they have chance to escape.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 12:01

The idea of violence against cameras may have some short-term effect but as a strategy it's idealistic, naive, and flawed. You're not going to smash all the evidence in this day and age. Kids these days, there's no innovation, you think you can just run around like in the 90s and 00s when the streets were a different place. You could act like a complete ass in the daytime back then and

wouldn't nobody get a decent picture. The night-march phenomenon is good -- it blurs the image automatically, and you don't have to act like a psychotic cop or grumpy bully and you just get to have fun. Yall have to respond to and work within your material conditions, not force everyone to live up to some anarcho-moralistic behavior code they don't even know about. If your shit just turns into spectacle, figure out ways to make it unspectacular.

Anonymous

Thu, 04/14/2016 - 13:53

Stop being such a condescending old fuss pot, you can't speak intelligently about tactics with broad generalizations like that. Smashing this one specific camera over here could be the smartest move, or it could be pointless depending on context. What the hell does morality have to do with camera smashing? The fuck are you even talking about?

L

Sun, 04/17/2016 - 19:16

Some experience with prescreening video before publication
This sort of thing varies with the nature of the action in question. A big liberal or semiradical march is one thing, a civil disobedience action another, and a riot another thing entirely. Still anytime anyone other than a cop objects to being shown, make sure that NOT ONE FRAME contains their image before you publish.

When I was in the Baltimore Uprising, I made a point of never pointing my camera at anyone breaking a window or otherwise doing more than marching once the battle started. Had I pointed a camera at someone throwing rocks it would literally have been like pointing a gun at them and justified the same response. Once the rocks started to fly, it was time to put the cameras away, to be damned careful about what OTHER footage from the earlier marches went out, and to be prepared to destroy that camera card if I got trapped with it by the pigs. That, BTW, is the reason for never taking any camera with nonremovable storage to anything that could turn into a riot: if you get trapped it's

much more expensive to have to smash your own camera than just a camera card.

Oh yeah--when things get hot, beware not only of your face but patches, emblems, markings on clothing and backpacks, etc. I was once asked to edit out a pattern on a backpack (and nothing else) in an HLS related building storming. Be especially aware of SHOES, cops here have the habit of photographing them, so avoid getting them in videos yourself and destroy/replace your shoes after anything "important."

Even a few years ago, security camera video footage was truly awful, I once saw FOX News stupidly air night footage of an HLS protest where the security camera could barely make out OUT-LINES of protesters. Times have changed, you can now get a full HD camera for \$45 bucks, so expect security footage from places that have been hit before to potentially be full HD video and better at night than before, though still at a very slow framerate for data storage reasons.

There are a lot of things here in DC where people want video, recently people doing a kayaktivism action went out of their way to get an extra boat for me for that reason. Even then, I made a point of not using the clips of the boats going in the water, so as not to expose the place the boats were launched from.

Then there are the pigs: they forfeit their right to not be on closeup video the moment they put on that badge...

In the interest of showcasing not only the formal writings of anarchists, but also the intelligence that happens in dialog, even (or sometimes especially) in dialog with anonymous strangers, anarchistnews.org presents this series: a collection of interesting original pieces, followed by some of the best of the responses to them from commenters on the website.